

524 Thonga boys are so fond of games that they even try to imitate
177 those of the Europeans. In the accompanying illustration, they
 — are seen sitting in two rows throwing some projectiles along the
 ground. I wondered what game this was, and was informed
 that these boys, having seen Portuguese officials playing billiards
 at the camp, had attempted to do the same, and this was the result!

C. THE AGE OF PUBERTY

I. *Circumcision rites.*

1) SPREAD AND ORIGIN OF CIRCUMCISION AMONGST THE THONGAS.

857 As he grows up, the Thonga boy leaves the flock of goats
 and is entrusted with the care of the big cattle, oxen and cows,
881 when his father owns any. He becomes very proud, and tyrannises
882 over his younger brothers; he calls himself their "hosi,"
866 their chief, and sends them to work for him; in Maputju, big
 — boys went so far as to scorn water brought from the pool by
 women, and only to use water specially fetched by small boys.
 If they grow so important in their own eyes, the reason is that
 special rites are performed on them during this period, rites which
 are calculated to give them great self-confidence. Amongst these
 rites, some have a direct relation with the sexual life and some
 represent only the entrance upon manhood. Let us begin with
 a study of circumcision, then we will take the other puberty rites
 and the habit of *gangisa*.

881 In a great many Bantu tribes, the age of puberty is marked
304 by ceremonies of initiation, often accompanied by circumcision.
 — There is little doubt that circumcision was practised throughout
 the Thonga tribes in former times. It is still current with those
 Thongas who emigrated into the Transvaal, and this is not a
 custom borrowed from the Pedi clans, which have all preserved
 circumcision. Though the Thongas often receive initiation in
 Pedi schools, in the Spelonken, they possess their own schools

881 For the Nkunas near Leydsdorp. They have a special word for
304 the physical operation, *yimba*, (in Ronga *soka*) which is used
together with *ngoma* (Sutho *goma*), the generic term for all the
customs connected with it. (It must not be forgotten that the
word *ngoma* is also used for other initiations, especially for the
initiation of widows, as will be seen in Chap. II.)

881 Amongst the Ba-Ronga, circumcision was abandoned more
175 than a hundred years ago, before the arrival of Manukosi, and
304 they were called *Ba-butoya*, the cowards, by other Northern
clans, who said they feared the sufferings of that cruel school.
Mboza has seen some old Ronga men who had been circumcised
probably at the beginning of the XIXth Century. It is well known
that somewhat later Chaka put a stop to the custom amongst
the Zulus; it did not fit in with the new military system inaugurated
by him. When the Ngoni general Manukosi invaded the plains
of the Low Country, it is not surprising that circumcision dis-
appeared in those clans also. The constant fighting which
prevailed in those troubled times did not allow men to stay
three consecutive months in a circumcision lodge. It was feared
also that circumcised boys would be killed by the enemy, being
unable to run away in case of an invasion. But old men in
the Bilen country assert that the *Ngoma* is a very old custom
amongst the Thongas, and that it has long been practised by
all their clans.

881 Is it possible to ascertain its true origin? My informants,
177 Viguet especially, were convinced that the *Ngoma* was brought
563 to the tribes of the Northern Transvaal by the *Ma-Lemba*, and it
304 is a historical fact that, as regards the Ba-Venda of that country,
the rite was adopted quite recently under the influence of the
Ma-Lemba. These *Ma-Lemba* are a very curious people, living
amongst the Thongas and the Suthos of Zoutpansberg, just like
the Jews amongst the European nations, without a chief, without
national unity, but with characteristic customs to which they
adhere from generation to generation... They resemble the Jews
in the fact that they do not eat flesh unless all the blood has been
first carefully drained away. They dread eating blood above all
else, and they shave at each new moon. They brought with them

821 parents. Some may escape, but if they happen to be at hand on
881 the next occasion, they will be included by consent or by force.
304 Even an adult member of the tribe can be compelled to go through
 the initiation, if he is found in the country in an uncircumcised
 state. The time of year chosen for the opening of the school is a
 month during which the morning star appears, in winter. *Ngongomela*,
Venus, is the herald of the day. She precedes the sun, so
 she must lead the boys to their new life, from darkness to the
 light! (Valdo)

643 One day all the candidates are gathered in the capital ; for this
 881 school is the business of the chief, and has been arranged by the
 council of the headmen (*tinduna*) over which he presides ; he
 has the supervision of it, and will receive the fees from the initiated
 later on. Boys circumcised four years ago must also attend the
 whole school as shepherds (*barisi*, *psitjiba*), namely as servants of
 the men and watchers over the candidates. They have already
 partly built the lodge outside the village, in a remote place, not too
 far away however, because the women must bring food each day for
 all the inmates of the " yard of mysteries ".

881 After having slept in the capital, early in the morning, when
Ngongomela rises in the East, the band of the uncircumcised
 goes out from the inhabited world to the wilderness, to the lodge.
 This is the first separation rite. The second is this : they find on
 the road a fire made of strongly scented wood ; when they smell
 the smoke, they must jump over it. This rite is called : *Tlula*
ritaa, to jump over the firebrand.

533 Later on, when still at some distance from the newly built
 881 lodge, they hear a great noise, a song accompanied by the beating
 of drums and blowing of antelope horns. They must not under-
 stand the meaning of the words which are sung by the host of
 shepherds and the men, as it would frighten them too much :

The little boy cries ! Bird of the winter !

881 Here they are halted. Eight of them are chosen and told to
 go forward. Each one is given an *assagai*, and they are pushed
 between the singers, who hold sticks and stand facing each other

1) THE CUSTOM OF THE EROTIC DREAM (Tilorela).

881
195
751 When a young man has noticed for the first time an emissio seminis, he is said to have become an adult (a kulile, a thombile) to have "drunk the nkanye." The nkanye is the tree from which the bukanye is made. It is prepared for the great feast of the new year. To drink the nkanye is an euphemism to designate the entrance into a new phase of life, into the age of puberty. According to Mboza, the lad must go early in the morning to wash his body, and that is all. But Tobane says that, in the Mpfumo clan, the family doctor is called: in a broken pot, he roasts pieces of skin of all the beasts of the veldt, together with some half digested grass taken from the stomach of a goat (psanyi). The boy must eat a little of this medicine and rub all his joints with it. This will strengthen him so that, when he has relations with girls, he will not be overcome (gemiwa) by them. This rite, which is very similar to the rite of the broken pot performed for infants, is connected with the "gangisa," the sexual habits of young people which begin at the time of puberty, as we shall see later on.

881
291
177
789
832 At this time also, the boy begins to wear the very primitive clothing called *shifado* (sha ku siba, the thing with which one closes, see Annotatio I). In former times they wore only the *mbayi*, a small cylindrical or conical object of woven palm leaves, which was the national dress of the Thongas; the *shifado* seems to be of Zulu origin. It is very much valued as preventing contact with the earth, as a protection against ants and an aid to continence; the lads who do not wear it are blamed and accused of being *ba-nato*. The word *nato* means a magical medicine by means of which men of low morals throw men or women into a deep sleep during the night, enter the huts of other people and commit adultery with their wives.

2) THE PIERCING OF THE EARS (Ku tjunya, (Ro.), boshela. (Dj.).

881
304
177 This also takes place at this period. There are two ways of performing it, either by an actual piercing of the lower lobe with a thorn, or by cutting it with a knife. The first method

1[See p. 516 in these categories or in 116 - "Analyst"]

881 is the old Thonga custom, and has been preserved by the women
 304 in its original form, at least amongst the Ba-Ronga ; they frequently
 177 pass a ring through the small opening thus produced. The second
 was practised by the Zulu-Ngonis, and was adopted by the Thonga
 men in order to resemble their conquerors. The result is an ugly
 hole. This is not a law imposed by the chief ; it is however
 universally observed. When a lad does not pierce his ears, his
 comrades mock him, saying. " U toya ! " " You are a coward !
 We shall put a spoonful of porridge in this big ear of yours ! "
 (Viz. It will hold food because it is not pierced !)

881 The operation is performed in the winter by a man who
 304 knows how to do it. Before it is begun, the boy bites the *ndjao*,
 824 the root of a kind of juncus which is considered the best means
 833 of strengthening the virile force. The doctor introduces into
 the hole a small piece of reed ; he takes it out every day to wash
 the wound and puts it in again to keep the hole open. As long
 as the ear is not healed, the lad must eat his food without salt ;
 he must not go about in the kraals and partake of the porridge of
 other people, because this food might have been prepared by
 women having intercourse with their husbands (*ba ku khila*)
 and this would make him very ill (1). He must also keep away
 from girls. When he is healed, he takes away the piece of hard
 reed and replaces it by a pretty white object.

304 Some Thongas tattoo themselves, or used to do so formerly,
 178 but this custom is disappearing and is now preserved only by
 women. We shall describe it in the chapter on the evolution
 of the woman, as well as the *hlela* custom, the pointing of the
 teeth.

It is probable that in former times the taboo character of these
 various ceremonies was more marked than now. At present they
 are merely a *shihila sha tiko*, a custom of the country.

(1) This alimentary taboo, as well as the interdiction of sexual relations, even of
 intercourse with married people, clearly shows that the piercing of the ears is a ritual
 passage. (p. 74).

881 home to her true mother. She also presents her with a pot of beer. A feast takes place on this occasion and the kunga rite is performed, just as for the circumcised boy on the day of his aggregation (page 93). Little presents will be brought by the girl to her adoptive mother who will distribute them to old women. If the initiated girl has been already bought by lobola, the mother goes with her to her future husband and says to him: "She is grown up." He will give her a present of £ 1., and the veil will be taken away. These last rites distinctly mean the aggregation of the girl to adult society, and all this khomba custom is a very good example of a passage rite, the passage being from the asexual to the sexual group.

881
178 The Pedi-Sutho clans of the Transvaal also practise this rite, which they call *khoba*. In addition they have the *bale*, the initiation school for girls, corresponding to the circumcision school of the boys. The Nkuna clan of the Thongas is said to have practised it also in former times, but the *bale* has entirely disappeared all through the Thonga tribe.

There are three other customs more or less related to nubility: tattooing, the pointing of the teeth and the milebe custom.

2) TATTOOING (Tlhabela tinhlanga).

304 There have been different methods of tattooing amongst the Thongas. In former times, in the Northern clans, the Ba-Thonga used to disfigure themselves by making very big black pimples on the forehead, the nose, and the cheeks. Hence the name of *Knobnussen* which they received from the Boers in Spelonken. Even the men were tattooed, but they shewed only one line of pimples down the middle of the face, from the forehead to the chin. Women had, in addition, two horizontal lines on the forehead and three on each cheek. It was a custom of the primitive population and is still observed by the Ba-Chopi. The invaders of the XVth or XVIth century adopted it because they were mocked by their subjects, who said: "Flat noses are not

304

right!" When the Ba-Ngoni of the XIXth century came, they submitted themselves to the custom, not from fear of mockery, but to hide their Zulu nationality. Chaka had sent his impis to kill them and, as they were recognised by the absence of pimples, they began to tattoo themselves. When the danger was passed,

[142]



Phot. H.-A. Junod.

Tattooed women of the Nkuna clan.

they ceased to perform the operation. They began in their turn to mock the Thongas who had followed their example.

Amo.gst the Ba-Ronga it is not certain that the big black pimples ever existed. In former times men used to make two lines of small pimples on both sides of the body, extending from the nipple and from the shoulders downwards. Now the custom

304

881

304
881 is dying out; it is practised only by women, undoubtedly in connection with nubility or with marriage. But the tattooing of the face has disappeared almost entirely. What remains is the tattooing of the shoulders and of the epigastric and hypogastric regions.

The operation is painful; girls sometimes cry and must be forced to submit to it. The patterns are triangular. Four triangles are first drawn on the shoulders on both sides; the upper triangles meeting with the lower ones at their apex, so as to leave a square place, not tattooed, in the middle of the back. This drawing is made with ochre; the skin is caught up and lifted with a little iron hook all along the line and slightly cut with a razor. All the incisions must be of the same size. The blood oozes out and is stopped by the ochre, which is profusely spread over the small wounds. Tattooing of the back is not very painful. It is more so on the anterior part of the body. These four triangles are also drawn under the breasts, leaving a square place of which the navel occupies the exact centre. But between the two upper triangles two others are introduced, forming a conical shaped pyramid whose point comes between the breasts.

Such is the ordinary arrangement of the tattoo pimples in Nondwane, but it varies considerably according to the clans, as the two adjoining plates clearly show. The two Nkuna women, whom I photographed at Shiluvane in 1900, have only two lines of pimples, forming a right angle under their right breast. The Rev. Alex. Jaques has kindly sent me two other photographs of tattooed Tembe girls taken in August 1926 and Mrs. Jaques has drawn an enlarged figure of the marks which shows plainly the patterns adopted in that part of the country. I reproduce them in a second illustration. Here the four triangles are distinctly seen.

304
881
178 The freshly tattooed girl hides herself for a week, after which she shows herself to her boy (shigango), who will kill a fowl for her to congratulate her. He says: "It is pretty to tattoo yourself. Otherwise your belly would be like the belly of a fish, or of a white person!" The time of healing is considered as a disease (perhaps as a marginal period). It is taboo to put salt in the food during

304
881
178

these days, or to go to the village to eat the food of other people (just as it is for boys who pierce their ears). Girls prepare themselves for the operation by eating a special food which softens

[142]



Photo. A. Jacquot.

Tattooed women of the Tembe clan.

the skin of the belly (nabyala khuri). All these rules tend to show that, in former times, tattooing had a deep meaning, a ritual value which has more or less disappeared. Mboza told me: "It is not a regular taboo (yila), but only a custom (shihila) of the country."

3) POINTING OF THE TEETH (Ku hleta).

³⁰⁴
⁸⁸¹ This custom is also dying out. It used to be incumbent on all the girls. Now many do not observe it. They have seen that teeth deformed in this way decay more quickly. The operation is performed on the incisors, and girls must keep their mouths closed for two or three days, not showing their teeth to anybody.

Near Rikatla, the hleta custom was still in force in the heathen villages in 1910. It gives the girls a kind of canine aspect.

4) THE MALEBE CUSTOM.

³⁰⁴
⁸⁸¹ This is very wide-spread all over South Africa. Though it has disappeared now amongst most of the Ronga clans, it is still practised in the Manyisa country, over the whole of Bilen and in the Northern clans, amongst the Zulus, the Pedi-Suthos, etc. It is probably the origin of the famous "Hottentot apron," which some ethnographers thought to be a congenital malformation, and which is merely the result of this custom (Annotatio 5). It is a very ugly habit, very immoral from our point of view, fixing the imagination of the girl on sexual relations, but amongst the Thongas it is upheld as being quite the right thing.

B. MARRIAGE AND CONJUGAL LIFE

1) CONDITIONS OF MARRIAGE

⁵⁸¹
⁸³² In the primitive Bantu tribe every girl gets married, some, however, sooner than others. Suitors prefer pretty girls to ugly ones! But what is their standard of beauty? The ideal is tall stature, strong limbs and well developed breasts. A proverb

[See p. 517 in these categories on in 116-Analysis]

727 "hot" and from special plates (mireko) and broken pots. They are forbidden to drink water. Their food must be cold. The chief 783 kills oxen for them (yi ba lumisa hi tihomu); but if the meat 834 were hot it would make them swell internally "because they 761 are hot themselves, they are defiled (ba na nsila)." If they ate hot food, the defilement would enter into them. "They are black (ntima). This black must be removed" (Mankhelu). During all this time sexual relations are absolutely forbidden to them.

727 They must not go home to their wives. In former times the 304 Ba-Ronga used to tatoo them with special marks from one eyebrow to the other. Dreadful medicines were introduced into the incisions and there remained pimples "which gave them the appearance of a buffalo when it frowns" (1).

789 After some days a medicine-man comes to purify them (ku bai 727 phutula). "to remove their black." There seem to be various 783 means of doing it, according to Mankhelu. Seeds of all kinds are put into a broken pot and roasted, together with drugs and psanyi of a goat. The slayers inhale the smoke which emanates from the pot. They put their hands into the mixture and rub their limbs with it (ba tilula) especially the joints.

789 Viguet describes this last act thus:—Pieces of medicinal roots 727 are put into the broken pot and roasted. They inhale the smoke. 782 Then cow's milk is poured into the pot on the embers and, when it boils, they have to put their fingers into it, one hand after the other, and pass them across their lips emitting the sacramental: "tsu" (which proves that it is a sacrifice to the gods, a religious act). Afterwards they say: "Phee! phee!" — viz.,

789 phephela phansi, (Dj. tikela hansi), "Go down, sink." This 727 means: "May you go deep into the earth, you, my enemy and 783 not come back to torment me." The last part of the treatment consists in rubbing the biceps, the legs, and the whole body with this milk. The medicinal embers are carefully collected, and reduced to a powder; this will be put into small bags of skin called *tintebz* which the slayer will wear round his neck. They contain

578 (1) Hence an expression which is still in common use. When Ba-Ronga wants to defy some one he says to him: "You are a coward! If you say you can tackle me come and kiss my forehead."

After, the slayers returned from battle—Analyst]

726 On the other hand sexual relations, which are allowed in ordinary
 829 life, become taboo. This period of fighting seems really to be
 834 considered as a marginal period for the whole tribe.

It is so par excellence for the warriors and I think that many of the rites imposed upon them are to be explained in this way. As we saw, the period of margin is generally preceded by separation rites. (See page 74.) Some of these, which are very characteristic, are performed when the army starts: the leave-taking from the General with wild shouts, the custom of swallowing a piece of meat without touching it with the hands and taking an emetic afterwards, that of jumping over the ntjhopfa branch, the medicine of oblivion! etc. The triumphant return, the partaking of the meat of the oxen which have been taken, may be the aggregation ceremonies, viz., the acts by which the warriors return to their ordinary life.

726 Passage rites are still more distinct in the case of the slayers; but
 829 their condition is worse, as it implies the idea of defilement following
 834 upon murder and is attended with the danger proceeding from the *nuru*.
 782 They are "hot" (an expression which also applies to the tabooed woman
 783 during her menses etc.); they are "black" (an epithet which also designates the grave-diggers, the bereaved mother, etc.). Hence a seclusion much more complete, a true period of margin with many alimentary and sexual (1) taboos. Possibly the incisions on the brow are an old kind of tatooing in connexion with this marginal period, similar to the inguinal incision of the widows (p. 201). The purification rites are of the same kind as those of the mourners, and particularly of the grave-diggers. The return to society, after their seclusion, is marked by rites of separation from the marginal period, which no doubt aim at getting rid of the defilement connected therewith. (Exposure of the *mizilo* outside the village in the bush.) Is it not striking to notice the correspondence between these rites in their peculiar sequence and those of the circumcision school, of mourning, of moving a village?

See, as a conclusion to Part III, *Practical Conclusions*, No. VI: "The New era and the Future of the South African Tribe."

834 (1) The sexual taboos are so severe that, after the Moosudi battle, one of the slayers
 727 took great offence at a man who dared to touch his food, as the man was living in his home and had relations with his wife. The slayer was afraid that this contact might cause his own death or bring misfortune to his family.

831 -I mbolo ya shuburu.

881 -Penis est incircumcisi viri.

Banhwanyana ba ka Makwakwa ba kundja na ba hlanamile.
N'yini?

Puellæ ex regione Makwakwa manibus apertis coeunt. Quid
significant hæc verba?

-I mahlehlwa.

-Est semen mahlehlwa.

(Hlehlwa is the seed of a creeper growing along the ground;
this seed [517] is of the same size as a two shilling piece and
possesses, in its central part, two hooks standing up.)

[Note 4 (page 88): these are the formulae:

Shana khololwane ma ri tiba le'ri onhaka milebe?

Do you know the bird that injures the labia minora?

-I mbolo ya shuburu.

It is the penis of an uncircumcised man.

Banhwanyana ba ka Makwakwa ba kundja na ba hlanamile.

N'yini?

The girls from the region of Makwakwa have intercourse
with open hands. What do these words mean?

-I mahlehlwa.

-Mahlehlwa is the semen.

(Hlehlwa is the seed of a creeper growing along the ground;
this seed [517] is of the same size as a two shilling piece and
possesses, in its central part, two hooks standing up.))

832 "Annotatio quinta (P. 98. 182). Externorum genitalium

836 minora labra verbo milebe (singul. nebe) designantur, quæ

304 puellæ adeo trahere solent ut ea usque ad quinque, decem,

881 etiam quindecim centimetra extendant. Quæ labra nonnunquam

171 parvis baculis metiuntur, eorum longitudine, apud comites

suas, immo apud sponsores, gloriantes. Iatis pravis moribus
enim nihil aliud puellæ sequuntur nisi futuri mariti gratiam,

cui apud Ba-Pedi, si sponsam suam labra non satis ex-

tendisse arbitratur, eam domum dimittere et boves suos

reposcere licet. Puellæ aululam pulmenti plenam parant quam

operculo claudunt. Ad quas pueri vespere veniunt et stipem

dant ut admittantur. In casae solo considunt et puellas cen-

antes spectant dum digitos in aululam demittunt. Puellæ

quarum milebe quatuor digitos longa sunt, quatuor digitis

usque comedunt: bakulu, sunt, i. e. adultæ, et lætantur am-

atores. Aut tribus tantum, duobus aliquando utantur.

Adolescentulæ cavis manibus cenant.

[Note 5 (pages 98 and 182). The labia minora of the outer
genitals are called by the word milebe (singular nebe), and
the girls are in the habit of pulling them so much that they
extend from five or ten to as many as fifteen centimeters.

832 Sometimes the girls measure their labia with small sticks
 836 and boast of their length to their companions and even to their
 304 bridegrooms. The girls follow these perverse practices for
 881 no other reason than for the sake of their future husband.

171 Among the Ba-Pedi the husband may, if he thinks that his
 bride has not sufficiently stretched her labia, send her home
 and demand his bulls back. The girls keep a pot full of food
 ready and cover it with a lid. In the evening the boys come
 to the girls and give them a small gift in order to be admitted.
 In the house they sit down on the floor and watch the girls eat-
 ing from a pot with their fingers. The girls whose milebe are
 four digits long eat using four fingers: they are bakulu, that
 is, adult, and they enjoy their lovers. Or they use only three
 fingers and sometimes two. The young girls eat with the
 palms of their hands.]

765 "Annotatio sexta (P. 154). Seu quis per ætatem iam pro-
 783 vectam imbecillior factus erit, sive qualibet de causa tam
 833 impotens ut sperma emittere non possit (a nga kumi mati),
 ceteri yiri quid fiat sciscitabuntur. Quod si utique parum
 procedit, tota inhibetur cærimonia. Qui vero se invicem
 eodem ritu miscere debebant, iis ritum conficere non fas est.
 Ille jejuniis, per quinque dies, prout res postulat, artissime
 utetur, cui medicinæ ad rem accommodatæ exquirentur.

[Note 6 (page 154). If someone should have become feeble
 because of advanced age, or if for some reason he should be
 so impotent that he cannot emit sperms (a nga kumi mati),
 other men ask what should be done. For if it proceeds quite
 insufficiently, the whole ceremony is held up. And those who
 should have had intercourse in turn in the same ritual fashion
 are not permitted to complete the rite. He [the impotent man]
 has to fast very strictly for five days as the situation requires
 and the remedies appropriate to the situation will be sought.]

843 "Annotatio septima (P. 154). Nocens maritus uxorque sui
 834 purgandi causâ alium ritum peragent. Uxor mariti suæque
 841 pudenda veste intima et inquinatissima tergebit, quam postea
 comburet.

Ambo, ad ignem accedentes, caput manusque calefacient.
 Inde cinerem collectum mulier adipe miscet, quo mariti
 artus illinit, digitis brachiis cruribusque tractis, quod
 'lula' dicitur. Postea, noctibus duabus sequentibus, coibunt.
 Si maritus, non cum uxore sua, sed cum puella quâdam ex
 alio vico, stupri consuetudinem junxerit, huic fossorium
 donabitur, ut ritum 'lula' perfectum veniat.

[Note 7 (page 154). If the husband and the wife are guilty
 of an offense, they perform another rite for the sake of
 purging themselves. The wife will cover her husband's and